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The Secrets Boom

So many Federal employees are now selling American secrets to foreigners that the country faces an acute secrets shortage.

Within the past two weeks authorities struggling to stop the secrets drain have arrested Government workers, both active and retired, on charges of peddling the stuff to China, Israel and the Soviet Union. Does anyone doubt that dozens of other foreign powers are even now in touch with financially desperate Federal workers eager to cash in while there are still secrets left for selling?

School guidance counselors already report a sharp decrease in the number of students interested in careers on the Federal payroll. When asked why Government work is not appealing, 72 percent check the box opposite "job offers inadequate opportunity for windfall profits."

Balfour Jakes, a Federal employment specialist, recently told the Senate Classified Documents Committee that "a lot of these kids think their parents' generation is selling off the secrets so fast that there will be none left to sell when they become old enough to enter the Federal work force."

Mr. Jakes hears worried questions when he meets with students. For example: "What is the Government doing to create new secrets to replace those now being squandered?" And, "How can the Government protect its employees from getting their kneecaps shot off when they drop a bundle on the ponies if there are no secrets left that are worth big bucks to our nation's enemies?"

The threat is clear. Unless action is taken, the Federal payroll may decline drastically in the near future.

President Reagan's Commission on the Impending Disaster was appointed to deal with this threat by creating new secrets faster than Government workers can sell them.

The plan was for the United States to produce so many secrets that our

enemies would spend themselves into bankruptcy trying to buy them.

Then, of course, someone noted that Israel, which is one of our friends, was also in the market. If Israel spent itself into bankruptcy, potential allies around the world would say: "What's the use of befriending America? Look how it treated Israel."

"Why don't we give Israel the secrets free?" asked President Reagan.

The President was a wonderful human being, but he never understood the nature of governments. "If we give Israel all our secrets free," a C.I.A. man pointed out, "Israel will spend herself into bankruptcy trying to buy the secret of why we are giving Israel free secrets."

At the commission's first meeting there was a ceremonial presentation to Mr. Reagan of the first new secret it had produced, an eyes-only item about joist specifications created for the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

This gave the White House a photo opportunity, which the President decided to exploit after being told that the new secret had been sold the night before for \$250 to agents of the Government of Chad by a janitor at H.U.D. who needed two new snow tires.

The President examined the secret and said he thought Chad had paid a ridiculously high price. Secretary of State Shultz noted, however, that while Chad couldn't afford big-budget espionage, it might have thought it was getting a great buy in a collector's item if the H.U.D. secret proved to be the last secret left in America. If that were the case, of course, it might sell to the Smithsonian Institution for many thousands of dollars.

Having provided a photo opportunity, the commission hasn't met since. Meanwhile, American inability to keep a secret is making us the laughingstock of the spy world. Even Britain, long notorious as dispenser of secrets to the entire world, is enjoying our embarrassment.

Last week, N., the Soviet mole in charge of the British Secret Service, kept a straight face while presenting the United States Ambassador to London with an airplane shipment of Britain's secrets. "For our English-speaking cousins in their hour of need."

As this goes to press I am informed that Federal employees, alarmed by the secrets drain, plan to band together and set sharply reduced quotas on sales, thereby driving up the price of secrets. More on this later as soon as I can raise the cash to pay for the complete details. □